

Grand River Times

The Newsletter of the Grand Rapids Historical Society

Inside this issue:

Cover Story: Walking Tour of the History of Oakhill Cemetery

Letter from our President: page 2

Oakdale Neighborhood History: page 3

2011 - 2012 GRHS Programs: pages 4 and 5

Grand Rapids Public Library's September Photo Sleuth: page 5



Great Lakes History Conference, local papers: page 6

History-related things to do in September: page 7

A Walking Tour of the History of Oakhill Cemetery

Thomas R. Dilley

Saturday, September 10, 2011, at 10 a.m.

written by Thomas R. Dilley

The grandest of the historic cemeteries of Grand Rapids, Oakhill Cemetery has been in existence for more than 150 years. Here are buried many of the most important players in the history of the city, and here are many of the most interesting and elaborate monuments to those people. Please join us for a walking tour of the northern half of this historic cemetery, and learn about its history and occupants, as well as the art and architecture of this wonderful, historic place.

Oakhill Cemetery was opened, at the eastern edge of the limits of the city of Grand Rapids, in October, 1859. The original parcel, located entirely north of Hall Street, consisted of approximately 35 acres, and was privately administered by an association of lot owners until 1885 when it was taken over by the city. As the much talked about opening of the

new cemetery approached, the city purchased roughly 40 acres on the south side of Hall Street, and opened the Valley City Cemetery, also in 1859. The two cemeteries, of similar design, were operated separately until they were joined together, under City administration, as Oakhill Cemetery, in 1885.

The walking tour will encompass only a part of the northern portion of the cemetery. We will visit the last resting places of men and women who built the city of Grand Rapids and its industries during a time of phenomenal growth in Grand Rapids, and the entire Midwestern United States. We will also take an opportunity to view some of the monuments as the art objects which they truly are, preserved for us in stone, for all time.

Note: In case of severe weather, the rain date is Sunday, September 11 at 10:00 a.m. Cancellation will be announced on Grand Rapids Historical Society's Facebook page.



Thomas Dilley gives a tour of the southern portion of Oakhill Cemetery in September 2010.



The Grand River Times is the newsletter of the Grand Rapids Historical Society, published six times annually. Established in 1894, the Grand Rapids Historical Society is dedicated to exploring the history of West Michigan; to discover its romance and tragedy, its heroes and scoundrels, its leaders and its ordinary citizens. The Society collects and preserves our heritage, passing it on to new generations through books, lectures, and education projects.

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Gina Bivins
GRHS President

Dear GRHS members,

We hope each of you has had a spectacular and safe summer. After a brief break, your GRHS board is back in the swing of things with a new season of programs and two new members. Chris Kaupa and Jeff Sytsma were elected to the board at our annual meeting and banquet in May, and we welcome them in and look forward to their talents and interests.

The Grand Rapids Historical Society will be taking much of its show on the road this year with five of our eight programs being presented off-site. Yes, this means that most of them will not be at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum, which is our faithful co-sponsor and the usual home to our programs.

Last year Tom Dilley educated us on some of the famous and not so famous buried in the Oakhill Cemetery south section. We start this year in September by venturing into Oakhill Cemetery north of Hall Street with Tom again guiding the way. It is appropriate that we have invited Gary Eberle to speak in October about the history of Aquinas College and haunted Holmdene Hall, which will be held at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum. Our final program before the winter holiday break is at Temple Emanuel, where we will be enlightened about the history of this Jewish congregation in Grand Rapids. You can find more details about all of this year's programs in this newsletter.

Please check out our website at www.grhistory.org for the latest information on each of our programs, the books and magazines we have for sale, and for information on other history-related events in west Michigan. You can also keep up with us on Facebook.

Welcome to a new season with the Grand Rapids Historical Society and we hope to see you at Oakhill Cemetery on September 10!

Gina Bivins

Friend us on Facebook to keep up with all the latest on local history. Search "Grand Rapids Historical Society"

Oakdale Neighborhood History and Character

Oakhill Cemetery is on the edge of Grand Rapids' Oakdale Neighborhood. Within the neighborhood, the Oakdale Neighbors is a community development organization working "to create a neighborhood of grace and vitality by discovering, developing, and connecting skills and resources." They have a great website at www.oakdaleneighbors.org where you can find what they are doing to develop their neighborhood. The following article is an abbreviated version of the neighborhood history, and you can find the original article with more detail and references by going to the website, clicking on Oakdale Neighborhood, and going to the "draft history of the neighborhood."

Europeans traveled to the Grand River valley in the 1820s and 30s along established Indian trails. One of these "heavily timbered" paths from the city of Kalamazoo via Green Lake became Kalamazoo Avenue. Earlier called Bostwick Lake Road or State, it became an important thoroughfare as a wagon road in the 1840s and as a stage coach route in 1850. Kalamazoo Avenue lost a competition with Division Avenue to become a "plank road" to the city of Kalamazoo. The former Boston House Restaurant at 1353 Kalamazoo was a stagecoach stop on the route from Grand Rapids to Lowell.

Valley City Cemetery southwest of Hall and Eastern was created in 1859 and was joined to Oakdale Hill Cemetery (north of Hall) in 1885.

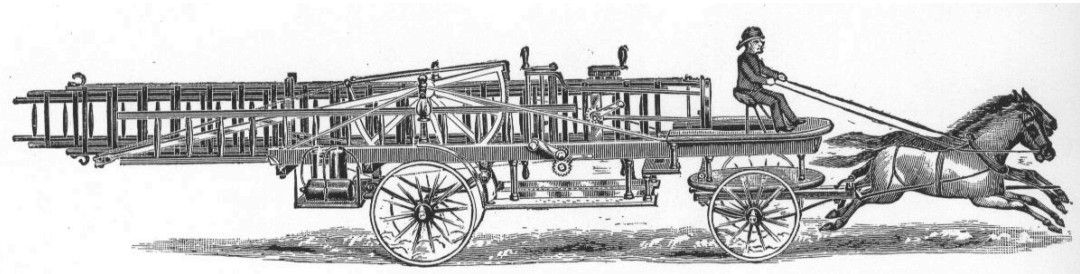
Oakdale Park was described as a residential green spot outside of the city in the late 1800s. The hope was that Oakdale Park would eventually include a pleasant park dedicated to the public. Early landowners in the neighborhood included Louis Campau, Abby and William Parsons, and Isabella and George Chesebro. Other landowners in the area included well-known names such as J.D. Alger and G.W. Griggs. The

north end of the neighborhood was platted in 1873, and most of the rest by 1888. The entire neighborhood was annexed to the City of Grand Rapids in 1891.

The railroad brought creative industry to the neighborhood. The tracks were built in 1888 by the Detroit, Lansing and Northern Railroad which became the Detroit, Grand Rapids and Western Railroad in 1896 and the Pere Marquette Railroad in 1899. An "Oakdale Park" depot and post office was operated near the corner of Eastern and Crofton as the first stop out of Grand Rapids on the Lake Odessa route. The depot building was eventually moved to Holland, Michigan.

The neighborhood has long been a center of innovation and creativity. Numerous furniture factories once lined the railroad tracks that skirt the southern edge of the planning area including: Haney School Furniture Company; Gunn Furniture Company; National Woodenware Company; Sterling Furniture of Grand Rapids; Grand Rapids Lounge Company; and Michigan Frame Company.

Among many other businesses, the neighborhood also housed the Michigan Fire Ladder and Truck factory that produced a fire truck and ladder combination that allowed firemen to be elevated to



Fire and Ladder Truck produced in the neighborhood (Source: Baker, p. 151)

sixty five feet in less than a half a minute. The ladder could also be "tilted in any direction and used where it would be impossible to operate an ordinary ladder." The Michigan Fire Ladder and Truck factory began operation in the neighborhood in 1888.

Grand Rapids Historical Society 2011 - 2012 Program Season

All programs are co-sponsored by the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum and are held in the Museum auditorium unless otherwise noted. Our programs are free and open to the public. Visit www.grhistory.org for more information.



September 10, 10 a.m.
Walking Tour of the History of Oakhill Cemetery
Thomas R. Dilley, GRHS
Trustee
Off site, north side of Oakhill Cemetery

The guided walk through the wonders of historic **Oak Hill Cemetery** that began last summer continues with a visit to the northern section of the cemetery. Local author and historian **Thomas Dilley** will talk about some of the

architectural wonders present in the cemetery as well as many of the interesting people from the City's past who rest there.

October 13, 7 p.m.
Haunted Grand Rapids, A History of Aquinas and Haunted Holmdene Hall

Gary Eberle, Professor, Aquinas College
Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum

Author Gary Eberle will recap how he came to write the now out-of-print *Haunted Houses of Grand Rapids* in 1982, then he will focus on 100-year-old Holmdene Manor, the former home of the Lowe family, which is now an administration and office building of Aquinas College. The talk will include a short DVD of Holmdene Manor, a building reputed by students to be haunted. Eberle will also talk about his role as Master of the Revels for Aquinas College's 125th anniversary being celebrated this year. Historic photos, ghosts, and stories, a perfect blend for an October evening.



November 10, 7 p.m.
Grand Rapids History: The Jewish Connection

Peg Finkelstein,
Barbara Robinson, and
Rabbi Michael
Schadick, Temple
Emanuel
Off site, Temple
Emanuel



January 12, 7 p.m.
St. Mark's Episcopal Church: Active in 175 Years of Grand Rapids History

Karen Hunter, St. Mark's
Off site, St. Mark's Episcopal Church

Founded in 1836, before Grand Rapids was a city, St. Mark's Episcopal Church has a history linked with the history of Grand Rapids. Called the church of mayors, St. Mark's members have been political and business leaders in Grand Rapids and in the nation. Some of the early member's names live on in the city in the form of park, institution, and street names.

Come join us on January 12, 2012 to learn more about St. Mark's and Grand Rapids. You will hear how the current building was born from the river, how the congregation survived the Great Tuna Book War, why the first bell installed in the current building weighed 1020 lbs and about the disappearing deacon and his French pony!



February 9, 7 p.m.

Jesse Buttrick Davis and “His Boys”: A History of the Early Grand Rapids Junior Chamber of Commerce

Nan Schichtel, GRHS Trustee

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum

Z.Z. Lydens called Jesse B. Davis one of “Greeson’s Triumvirate” and he was a prominent educational and civic leader during the 19-teens. Today, this highly-regarded Central High School principal is remembered for serving as the first president of Grand Rapids Junior – now Community – College. Others recognize Davis’ international reputation as one of the fathers of the vocational guidance movement. Those reps are correct, but for members of one Central High club, he was much more.

Hired to rid the GR’s public schools of bad influences including gambling and “other lewd activities” in downtown hotels, Davis formed innumerable school clubs, bands, and choirs. Collaborating with the Grand Rapids Board of Trade (now Area Chamber of Commerce), he started the Junior Board of Trade – the precursor to the Junior Chamber of Commerce, aka Jaycees. Grand Rapids Public Library’s archival collections are rich with examples of how, by harnessing the exuberant energies of junior- and high-school boys, Davis and “his boys” helped make GR a better place to live, and the boys grew into respected members of the community.

March 8, 7 p.m.

WWI, Women, and the Rise of Grand Rapids Farmers Markets

Jayson Otto, Grand Valley State University

Co-sponsored by the Greater Grand Rapids Women’s History Council

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum

April 12, 7 p.m.

Digging into the Civil War at the Public Museum

Museum staff and members of the Civil War Roundtable

Co-sponsored by the Grand Rapids Public Museum and the Civil War Roundtable

Off site, Grand Rapids Public Museum

There is always discovery in a collection as old and deep as the one held by the Grand Rapids Public Museum (organized in 1854). The research initiated for “Thank God for Michigan: Stories From the Civil War” continues even though the exhibit opened in June of 2011. Staff at the Museum and members of the Civil War Roundtable will share what they have learned about some of the “new” discoveries. You will have an opportunity to get a closer look at some of the objects and a chance to tour the exhibit.

May 10, 7 p.m.

Messing About Reeds Lake in Boats

Gail M. Snow

Also, GRHS Annual Banquet

Location to be determined



Grand Rapids Public Library Photo Sleuth

Each month the local history department of the Grand Rapids Public Library posts a different photo on a web page called Photo Sleuth to enlist the public’s help in identifying individuals in the photos. To find the photo on GRPL’s website, go to www.grpl.org and type “photo sleuth” in the search bar. Here are September’s photos.



These images come from the News Photographs Collection (#133). The Library has a whole series of photos from this collection listed as unidentified candidates, ca. 1962.

If you happened to know who either of these candidates are or what election, please email your information to kgillman@grpl.org, or call 616 988-5402, extension 5497.

Great Lakes History Conference: "Education and Society" October 7 - 8, 2011

The 37th annual Great Lakes History Conference, sponsored by Grand Valley State University, will be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on October 7-8, 2011. Professor William Reese, Carl F. Kaestle WARF Professor of Educational Policy Studies and History at the University of Wisconsin, will deliver the keynote address. Conference panels and papers will focus on the history of education broadly considered. The Great Lakes History Conference is a general history conference with an interdisciplinary emphasis. See www.gvsu.edu/history and link to the conference for fuller information.

On Saturday, October 8th, several papers will focus on subject matter specific to Grand Rapids, especially its women's history:

10:30 a.m. Panel Title: **Activist Educators among Grand Rapids' Progressive Era Women**

Paper #1: **Politics and Food: Women in the History of Civic Agriculture** by Jayson Otto, Aquinas College

Paper #2: **The Bay View System of Popular Education: Higher Education for All** by Mary Jane Doerr, Author of *Bay View, An American Idea*

Paper #3: **A Professional, In and Out of Institutional Education: Josephine Ahnefeldt Goss** by Marcella Beck, Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council

The three papers focus on area women's history in complementary ways:

1) Jayson Otto's paper will be drawn from his new thesis on civic agriculture and the institution of farmers' markets in Progressive Era Grand Rapids. This project turned him into an accidental women's historian when he discovered that urban women were sitting on Grand Rapids city committees and rocking the boat during WWI. And they did plenty of educating.

2) Mary Jane Doerr's paper will be drawn from her new history of Bay View (www.maryjanedoerr.com) and the extent to which educational aspirations underwrote the community and had far-ranging effect.

3) Marcella Beck's paper will focus on a Grand Rapids powerhouse who had one foot in the world of the public schools and the other in the broader civic education efforts of the Progressive Era: Josephine Ahnefeldt Goss. While Otto's and Doerr's papers will exclusively address "extended education," Beck's will also represent how Goss could reform from within the system.

At 3:30 p.m., the Grand Rapids Historical Commission's Diana Barrett will present a paper drawing on her work on school architecture history in Grand Rapids. Title: **"Nineteenth-Century School Technology: The "Outhouse" Comes 'In House.'"** Toilets were first put in the basements of school buildings, sometimes leading to explosions--a definite public health menace! Barrett's work on the local situation illustrates broader technological problems being faced around the country during a modernizing and reforming period.

History Related Events and Happenings in September:

Parks for Everyone: The Story of Grand Rapids Parks

April 7 – October 31, 2011

Main Library – 111 Library St NE

The Grand Rapids Public Library has partnered with the City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department and the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks to develop an exhibit featuring 38 parks and open spaces. Using historical and contemporary photos and interesting stories, this exhibit entertains and informs. Learn about the campground at Riverside Park and greenhouses at John Ball Park. See photographs of a pie-eating contest, a horseshoe game, ski jumping, and more. Whether you are old enough to reminisce about the changes or young enough to climb on the playgrounds, this exhibit is for you. Free and open to the public.

West Michigan Post Card Club

Monday, September 12, 7 p.m.

Highlands Middle School, 4645 Chandy NE

Wyoming: The First of the 'Burbs

Rescheduled from April, Norma Lewis and Jay de Vries will visit the Postcard Club to discuss the topic of their most recent book, *Wyoming, Michigan*. By the 1940s Wyoming had shed its farming roots and soon became one of the largest industrial areas in Southwest Michigan with General Motors paving the way with its 36th Street stamping plant. GM Diesel followed, along with Reynolds Metals, Kelvinator, Bell Fibre, and

Light Metals among others. With people moving in for the jobs, a thriving residential community resulted bringing more schools, churches, entertainment, and retail venues. Area residents have fond memories of Kum Bak burgers, drive-in movies, and shopping at Rogers Plaza, the area's first enclosed mall.

WMGS Family History Writers Workshop

Sep 20, 2011, 1:30 - 4:45 p.m.

TOPIC: What were the BEST things about the "Good Old Days?" Why?

We help and support each other's desire to write about our families with a kind eye and lots of humor. Everyone is welcome. Dominican Center, 2025 Fulton St East, Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids Civil War Roundtable:

Abraham Lincoln: From Log Cabin to White House

Jerry Maxwell

Wednesday, September 21, 2011, 7:30 p.m.

Kuyper College, DeWitt Student Center, 3333 E. Beltline

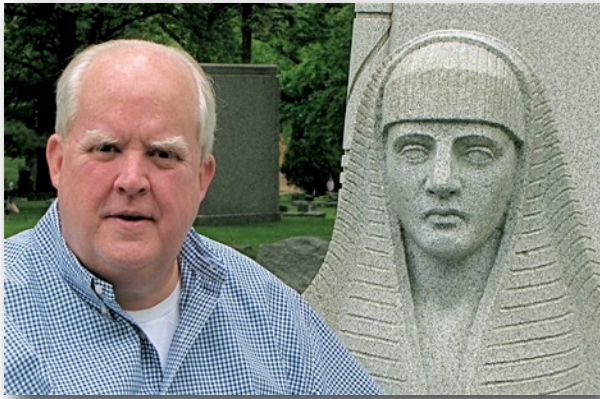
If you have history-related events you would like included in our calendar, please let us know at info@grhistory.org

At what 1876 event did furniture manufactured in Grand Rapids first gain national prominence?

Answer: The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition

Walking Tour of the History of Oakhill Cemetery

Thomas R. Dilley, GRHS Board Trustee



Saturday, September 10 at 10 a.m.

Oakhill Cemetery, North side of Hall Street

For more information, visit www.grhistory.org

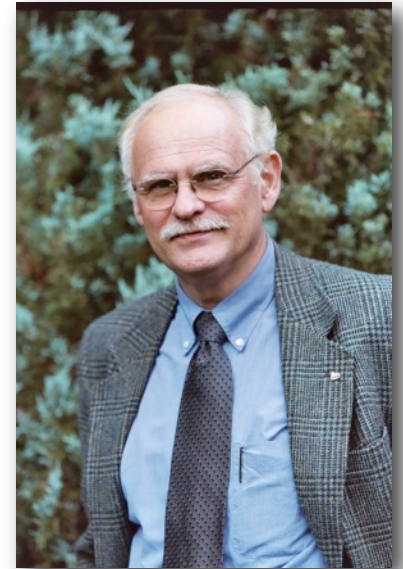
October Program

Haunted Grand Rapids, A History of Aquinas and Haunted Holmdene Hall

Gary Eberle
Professor of English
Aquinas College

October 13, 7 p.m.
Gerald R. Ford
Presidential Museum

www.grhistory.org
for more information



Co-sponsored by the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum

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